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## INTIMATIONS

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All letters for publication should be written on one

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Advertisements and Subscriptions which are not

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withdrawn.

Orders for extra copies of the Daily Press should

be sent before 11 a.m. on the day of publication.

After that hour he supply is limited.

The Attendance at the meeting of the

Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday was

wretchedly small, and the only topic those

who were present could find to discuss was a

mischievous little question of red tape. The

Chairman opened the proceedings with a

brief speech, touching on the subjects

mentioned in the report—which was

very lengthy, touching on many important

questions—after which he made an al-

most pathetic appeal to his hearers to "make

remarks." No one seemed to have any re-

marks to make, however, and the report was

adopted without discussion. Subsequently

it occurred to Mr. GRANVILLE SHARP to ask

whether any reply had been received to a

certain communication which had been made

to the Government. No reply had been re-

ceived. This gave rise to the discussion on

what we have called a question of red tape.

Ultimately the Chamber took up what we

cannot but regard as, a false and un-

dignified position. The case stands thus.

In July last Messrs. REISS &amp; Co. wrote

to the Chamber giving information as to

an attempted illegal exaction by

Chinese *tekin* officials at the entrance to

the harbour. This letter was sent by the

Chamber through the local Government, to

the British Minister at Peking, with a re-

quest that His Excellency might be pleased

to represent the matter at an early date to

the T'ung-li Yamen. The correspondence

closed with a letter from the Colonial

Secretary stating that the letter of the Chamber

with its enclosure had been duly trans-

mitted to the Minister. The fact that no reply

has been received from the Minister is re-

ported to the Chamber as proving that the

system of forwarding communications to the

Minister through the local Government was

unsuccessful, and a resolution was

adopted directing the Committee to com-

municate with the Secretary of State for Foreign

Affairs with a view to inform him of this.

But the proof is insufficient, and if the Com-

mittee carry out their instructions they will

commit a sin which will not be undeserved.

The letter was not one which called for a re-

ply; consequently the fact that no reply has

been received cannot be accepted as showing

the defectiveness of the channel of com-

munication. Mr. STRICKLAND, Messrs. REISS

and Co.'s representative, said that when he sent

in his letter it was only with the view

of conveying information which he had

no idea it was going to be sent to the Govern-

ment, and that he did not see how they could

expect a reply, seeing it was simply a state-

ment of fact. Nor does any reply seem to

have been expected by the Committee of the

Chamber, until the idea was struck out at

the meeting on Wednesday, for in their re-

port they simply say—"The representation

with regard to the action of the Chinese

officials was considered by your Committee

of sufficient gravity to be promptly reported

to the Local Government, and it will be seen

from the reply to the Chamber's letter, that

it has been submitted to Her Majesty's

Minister at Peking." There is no indication

ing the Consul at Canton to take action, or by

merely placing the evidence before the Hong-

kong Chamber of Commerce, which was waiting

at that time to deal with the very question

raised by such cases as the one in question.

Common sense, we should think, would have

dictated the latter course. In any case it is

too much to expect that the British Minister

and the T'ung-li Yamen can occupy them-

selves with questions arising out of the con-

duct of petty officers until the high provincial

authorities have been applied to for re-

dress by the Consul without avail. It

can hardly be necessary to remind the

Chamber that the Consul in China exercises

quasi-diplomatic powers, and that some-

times valuable time may be lost in appealing

to Peking instead of addressing the proper

Consular officer. Seeing that this is so, it

would probably be better in future if the

Chamber, in matters of purely local interest,

confined itself to addressing the local

Government and threw the responsibility on

the latter of deciding on the best channel of

communicating with the responsible Chinese

officials.

In the early part of last year Mr. O'CONNOR,

then Chargé d'Affaires at Peking, acting

under instructions from the Secretary of

State for Foreign Affairs in consultation

with the Colonial Office, requested the

Chamber to address any communications to

Her Majesty's Representative in Peking,

respecting the commercial interests of

Hongkong, through the regular channel of

the Government of the Colony. The di-

rection has caused extreme dissatisfaction,

almost disgust, in the mind of the Chairman

of the Chamber of Commerce. He con-

siders it a slur on "a body well-known

throughout the world, the Hongkong Cham-

ber of Commerce." To send communications

"respecting the commercial interests of

Hongkong" through the Government of

Hongkong, he says, "simply showing a re-

spect for whatever they may mean." "What

have they got to do with it?" he asks, and

he answers the question himself by saying

"They don't know anything about it."

All this strikes us as being very pitiful,

almost too much so to call for serious

argument. Yet, as the question has

been raised with such earnestness at what

we are accustomed to regard as the

most important and practical meeting of

the year—the meeting of the Hongkong

Chamber of Commerce—it may be well to

attempt to clear away the clouds which

seem to have obscured the vision of most

of the members on Wednesday. Before he

worked himself up to his full frenzy,

speaking in a more moderate tone, Mr. REISS

said:—"With all due deference to our friends

who are here managing the Government of

this colony, there must be questions arising

from time to time which they are not com-

petent to answer. The questions referred to

are questions 'respecting the commercial in-

terests of Hongkong.' Such are the words

in Mr. O'CONNOR's letter, conveying the in-

struction to which such serious objection

is taken. Now, if the Government were not

competent of such questions their ignorance

would be of a peculiarly culpable de-

scription. It would be no less culpable

on the part of the Chamber of Commerce

to leave them in such ignorance. On this

ground therefore it is desirable that the

communications should pass through the

hands of the local Government, so that in

case of any neglect they may not be able to

plead that they were left uninformed. On

the ground of saving time and labour the

same course has the merit of expediency.

Let us suppose that on a question respecting

the commercial interests of Hongkong the

Chamber of Commerce address the Minister

at Peking direct. What would happen?

The Minister would be able to do nothing

until he had communicated with the Govern-

ment here and forwarded to it either the

original or a copy of the Chamber's com-

munication. Surely it is a more direct route

to send from the Chamber to the Colonial

Secretary's office and thence to Peking

than to send first to Peking, back to

Hongkong, and then again to Peking.

If such a course as the latter had been sug-

gested by the Circulation Office we would

not have been surprised, but it certainly is

surprising to find it suggested by a body

supposed to be so eminently practical as the

Hongkong Chamber of Commerce. From

whatever point of view we look at it the

action of the Hongkong Government in re-

sponding to the Chamber's letter, that

it has been submitted to Her Majesty's

Minister at Peking." There is no indication

here that any reply was expected by the

Committee of the Chamber, until the idea

was struck out







